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Tomgram: Noam Chomsky, "The Most Dangerous Moment," 50 Years Later

By Noam Chomsky

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[Note for TomDispatch Readers: With Noam Chomsky writing at the site today, a reminder that a small number of copies of his signed book, *Hopes and Prospects*, are still available (for a contribution of \$125), as are copies of various books of mine, including *The End of Victory Culture* and *The United States of Fear*, as well as the first *Dispatch Book*, *Terminator Planet*, by Nick Turse and me, all signed and personalized for \$75-\$85. Visit our donation page to check out the details. Your contributions really do keep us rolling along! Tom]

Here was the oddest thing: within weeks of the United States dropping an atomic bomb on a second Japanese city on August 9, 1945, and so obliterating it, Americans were already immersed in new scenarios of nuclear destruction. As the late Paul Boyer so vividly described in his classic book *By the Bomb's Early Light*, it took no time at all -- at a moment when no other nation had such potentially Earth-destroying weaponry -- for an America triumphant to begin to imagine itself in ruins, and for its newspapers and magazines to start drawing concentric circles of death and destruction around American cities while consigning their future country to the stewardship of the roaches. Jcal

As early as October 1945, the military editor of *Reader's Digest* would declare the first atomic bomb "dated," and write, "It is now in the power of the atom-smashers to blot out New York with a single bomb... Such a bomb can burn up in an instant every creature, can fuse the steel buildings and smash the concrete into flying shrapnel." By 1947, in "Mist of Death Over New York," that staid magazine would have a description in "realistic detail" of an atomic explosion in New York harbor. ("Within six weeks, 389,101 New Yorkers were dead or missing.") In November 1945, in the "36-Hour War," *Life* would feature a mushroom cloud rising over Washington in a surprise attack slaughtering 10 million Americans. That December, the *Wall Street Journal* would run a feature article imagining "an attack by planes and missiles that could wipe out 98% of the population of the United States." !

Radio quickly followed with its own nightmarish nuclear scenarios of all-American disaster as, within years, would TV, while post-nuclear landscapes of horror were a dime a dozen in the world of pulp fiction. In the movies, mutant and irradiated creatures of every sort -- from previously somnolent giant reptiles to monstrous ants -- ran wild on screen. Everything, in a sense, became radioactive. There were even,

as Boyer wrote, "fashion tips for the apocalypse," as in a government-sponsored pamphlet with an illustration of a man in a fedora, its brim tipped down, captioned, "If you are caught outdoors in a sudden attack, a hat will give you at least some protection from the 'heat flash.'" This was the "duck and cover" world I grew up in ("you and I don't have shells to crawl into, like Bert the Turtle, so we have to cover up in our own way..."), one in which, though few spoke of it, everyone sensed that some "red line" had been crossed in the New Mexican desert and then at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was a world in which, for the first time, not God but human beings could create their own end times.

We still haven't taken it all in, but 50 years ago, there was a moment when it looked like all the futuristic fiction might indeed turn into reality, when (at least if you lived on the East Coast of the U.S.) it seemed as if events were drawing a concentric circle around you. That was, of course, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and anybody my age undoubtedly remembers with particular specificity the night of October 22, 1962, when President John F. Kennedy went on TV and the radio to tell us that we were all potentially toast. "We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth," he said grimly, "but neither will we shrink from the risk at any time it must be faced." At 18, with most of my life still theoretically ahead of me, I believed him.

cf. Second
of November
speech;
and
Aug 1961

Fifty years later, in his new TomDispatch post, Noam Chomsky reminds us of just how close we truly got to a self-induced apocalypse and why it came to that. It's a chilling tale about the imperial urge to control the world, one that still couldn't be more relevant. *Tom*

will, our sphere? (+ 50's?)

The Week the World Stood Still

The Cuban Missile Crisis and Ownership of the World

By Noam Chomsky

The world stood still 50 years ago during the last week of October, from the moment when it learned that the Soviet Union had placed nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba until the crisis was officially ended -- though unknown to the public, only officially.

2012

The image of the world standing still is the turn of phrase of Sheldon Stern, former historian at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, who published the authoritative version of the tapes of the ExComm meetings where Kennedy and a close circle of advisers debated how to respond to the crisis. Those meetings were secretly recorded by the president, which might bear on the fact that his stand throughout the recorded sessions is relatively temperate compared to other participants, who were unaware that they were speaking to history.

no (?)

What would he have said differently?

✓ Stern has just published an accessible and accurate review of this critically important documentary record, finally declassified in the late 1990s. I will keep to that here. "Never before or since," he concludes, "has the survival of human civilization been at stake in a few short

as JFK (who did not expect to be heard, ever)

NO

(2012)

weeks of dangerous deliberations," culminating in "the week the world stood still."

There was good reason for the global concern. A nuclear war was all too imminent, a war that might "destroy the Northern Hemisphere," President Dwight Eisenhower had warned. Kennedy's own judgment was that the probability of war might have been as high as 50%. Estimates became higher as the confrontation reached its peak and the "secret doomsday plan to ensure the survival of the government was put into effect" in Washington, as described by journalist Michael Dobbs in his well-researched bestseller on the crisis (though he doesn't explain why there would be much point in doing so, given the likely nature of nuclear war).

warning!

NO

(ambig. note of 'war')

NO

yes
(Chomsky!)

Dobbs quotes Dino Brugioni, "a key member of the CIA team monitoring the Soviet missile buildup," who saw no way out except "war and complete destruction" as the clock moved to "one minute to midnight," the title of his book. Kennedy's close associate, historian Arthur Schlesinger, described the events as "the most dangerous moment in human history." Defense Secretary Robert McNamara wondered aloud whether he "would live to see another Saturday night," and later recognized that "we lucked out" -- barely.

"The Most Dangerous Moment"

A closer look at what took place adds grim overtones to these judgments, with reverberations to the present moment.

There are several candidates for "the most dangerous moment." One is October 27th, when U.S. destroyers enforcing a quarantine around Cuba were dropping depth charges on Soviet submarines. According to Soviet accounts, reported by the National Security Archive, submarine commanders were "rattled enough to talk about firing nuclear torpedoes, whose 15 kiloton explosive yields approximated the bomb that devastated Hiroshima in August 1945."

In one case, a reported decision to assemble a nuclear torpedo for battle readiness was aborted at the last minute by Second Captain Vasili Arkhipov, who may have saved the world from nuclear disaster. There is little doubt what the U.S. reaction would have been had the torpedo been fired, or how the Russians would have responded as their country was going up in smoke.

Kennedy had already declared the highest nuclear alert short of launch (DEFCON 2), which authorized "NATO aircraft with Turkish pilots ... [or others] ... to take off, fly to Moscow, and drop a bomb," according to the well-informed Harvard University strategic analyst Graham Allison, writing in the major establishment journal *Foreign Affairs*.

NO

I in not Exeute

NO!

✓

✓

✓

Another candidate is October 26th. That day has been selected as "the most dangerous moment" by B-52 pilot Major Don Clawson, who piloted one of those NATO aircraft and provides a hair-raising description of details of the Chrome Dome (CD) missions during the crisis -- "B-52s on airborne alert" with nuclear weapons "on board and ready to use."

October 26th was the day when "the nation was closest to nuclear war," he writes in his "irreverent anecdotes of an Air Force pilot," Is That Something the Crew Should Know? On that day, Clawson himself was in a good position to set off a likely terminal cataclysm. He concludes, "We were damned lucky we didn't blow up the world -- and no thanks to the political or military leadership of this country."

The errors, confusions, near-accidents, and miscomprehension of the leadership that Clawson reports are startling enough, but nothing like the operative command-and-control rules -- or lack of them. As Clawson recounts his experiences during the 15 24-hour CD missions he flew, the maximum possible, the official commanders "did not possess the capability to prevent a rogue-crew or crew-member from arming and releasing their thermonuclear weapons," or even from broadcasting a mission that would have sent off "the entire Airborne Alert force without possibility of recall." Once the crew was airborne carrying thermonuclear weapons, he writes, "it would have been possible to arm and drop them all with no further input from the ground. There was no inhibitor on any of the systems."

About one-third of the total force was in the air, according to General David Burchinal, director of plans on the Air Staff at Air Force Headquarters. The Strategic Air Command (SAC), technically in charge, appears to have had little control. And according to Clawson's account, the civilian National Command Authority was kept in the dark by SAC, which means that the ExComm "deciders" pondering the fate of the world knew even less. General Burchinal's oral history is no less hair-raising, and reveals even greater contempt for the civilian command. According to him, Russian capitulation was never in doubt. The CD operations were designed to make it crystal clear to the Russians that they were hardly even competing in the military confrontation, and could quickly have been destroyed.

From the ExComm records, Stern concludes that, on October 26th, President Kennedy was "leaning towards military action to eliminate the missiles" in Cuba, to be followed by invasion, according to Pentagon plans. It was evident then that the act might have led to terminal war, a conclusion fortified by much later revelations that tactical nuclear weapons had been deployed and that Russian forces were far greater than U.S. intelligence had reported.

As the ExComm meetings were drawing to a close at 6 p.m. on the 26th, a letter arrived from Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev, sent directly to President Kennedy. His "message seemed clear," Stern writes: "the missiles would be removed if the U.S. promised not to invade Cuba."

The next day, at 10 am, the president again turned on the secret tape. He read aloud a wire service report that had just been handed to him: "Premier Khrushchev told President Kennedy in a message today he would withdraw offensive weapons from Cuba if the United States withdrew its rockets from Turkey" -- Jupiter missiles with nuclear warheads. The report was soon authenticated.

Though received by the committee as an unexpected bolt from the blue, it had actually been anticipated: "we've known this might be coming for a week," Kennedy informed them. To refuse public acquiescence would be difficult, he realized. These were obsolete missiles, already slated for withdrawal, soon to be replaced by far more lethal and effectively invulnerable Polaris submarines. Kennedy recognized that he would be in an "insupportable position if this becomes [Khrushchev's] proposal," both because the Turkish missiles were useless and were being withdrawn anyway, and because "it's gonna -- to any man at the United Nations or any other *rational* man, it will look like a very fair trade."

Keeping U.S. Power Unrestrained

the draft agree!

The planners therefore faced a serious dilemma. They had in hand two somewhat different proposals from Khrushchev to end the threat of catastrophic war, and each would seem to any "rational man" to be a fair trade. How then to react?

One possibility would have been to breathe a sigh of relief that civilization could survive and to eagerly accept both offers; to announce that the U.S. would adhere to international law and remove any threat to invade Cuba; and to carry forward the withdrawal of the obsolete missiles in Turkey, proceeding as planned to upgrade the nuclear threat against the Soviet Union to a far greater one -- only part, of course, of the global encirclement of Russia. But that was unthinkable. *to other*

*never mentioned!
(at the time, there was no conversation)*

The basic reason why no such thought could be contemplated was spelled out by National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, former Harvard dean and reputedly the brightest star in the Camelot firmament.

The world, he insisted, must come to understand that "[t]he current threat to peace is not in Turkey, it is in Cuba," where missiles were directed against the U.S. A vastly more powerful U.S. missile force trained on the much weaker and more vulnerable Soviet enemy could not possibly be regarded as a threat to peace, because we are Good, as a great many people in the Western hemisphere and beyond could testify

"No intent" to violate int'l law, invade

(I suspect for violation of some human and "no need to waste")

not "minor issue"!

JFK, McGB
social
McA
RFK
Harvard

?
Quinto?

-- among numerous others, the victims of the ongoing terrorist war that the U.S. was then waging against Cuba, or those swept up in the "campaign of hatred" in the Arab world that so puzzled Eisenhower, though not the National Security Council, which explained it clearly. *see now!*

Of course, the idea that the U.S. should be restrained by international law was too ridiculous to merit consideration. As explained recently by the respected left-liberal commentator Matthew Yglesias, "one of the main functions of the international institutional order is precisely to legitimate the use of deadly military force by western powers" -- meaning the U.S. -- so that it is "amazingly naïve," indeed quite "silly," to suggest that it should obey international law or other conditions that we impose on the powerless. This was a frank and welcome exposition of operative assumptions, reflexively taken for granted by the ExComm assemblage.

In subsequent colloquy, the president stressed that we would be "in a bad position" if we chose to set off an international conflagration by rejecting proposals that would seem quite reasonable to survivors (if any cared). This "pragmatic" stance was about as far as moral considerations could reach.

In a review of recently released documents on Kennedy-era terror, Harvard University Latin Americanist Jorge Domínguez observes, "Only once in these nearly thousand pages of documentation did a U.S. official raise something that resembled a faint moral objection to U.S.-government sponsored terrorism": a member of the National Security Council staff suggested that raids that are "haphazard and kill innocents... might mean a bad press in some friendly countries." *(see Ball; me)*

The same attitudes prevailed throughout the internal discussions during the missile crisis, as when Robert Kennedy warned that a full-scale invasion of Cuba would "kill an awful lot of people, and we're going to take an awful lot of heat on it." And they prevail to the present, with only the rarest of exceptions, as easily documented. *yes*

We might have been "in even a worse position" if the world had known more about what the U.S. was doing at the time. Only recently was it learned that, six months earlier, the U.S. had secretly deployed missiles in Okinawa virtually identical to those the Russians would send to Cuba. These were surely aimed at China at a moment of elevated regional tensions. To this day, Okinawa remains a major offensive U.S. military base over the bitter objections of its inhabitants who, right now, are less than enthusiastic about the dispatch of accident-prone V-22 Osprey helicopters to the Futenma military base, located at the heart of a heavily populated urban center. *see Tovich!*

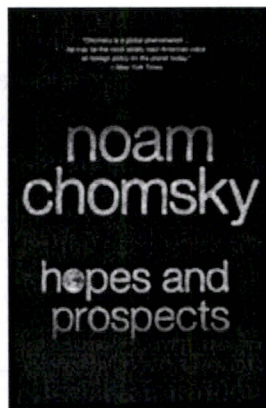
An Indecent Disrespect for the Opinions of Humankind

The deliberations that followed are revealing, but I will put them aside here. They did reach a conclusion. The U.S. pledged to withdraw the obsolete missiles from Turkey, but would not do so publicly or put the offer in writing: it was important that Khrushchev be seen to capitulate. An interesting reason was offered, and is accepted as reasonable by scholarship and commentary. As Dobbs puts it, "If it appeared that the United States was dismantling the missile bases unilaterally, under pressure from the Soviet Union, the [NATO] alliance might crack" -- or to rephrase a little more accurately, if the U.S. replaced useless missiles with a far more lethal threat, as already planned, in a trade with Russia that any "rational man" would regard as very fair, then the NATO alliance might crack.

small group

yes

yes!
(invasion
army
threat)



To be sure, when Russia withdrew Cuba's only deterrent against an ongoing U.S. attack -- with a severe threat to proceed to direct invasion still in the air -- and quietly departed from the scene, the Cubans would be infuriated (as, in fact, they understandably were). But that is an unfair comparison for the standard reasons: we are human beings who matter, while they are merely "unpeople," to adapt George Orwell's useful phrase.

hard ones

Buy the book.

Kennedy also made an informal pledge not to invade Cuba, but with conditions: not just the withdrawal of the missiles, but also termination, or at least "a great lessening," of any Russian military presence. (Unlike Turkey, on Russia's borders, where nothing of the kind could be contemplated.) When Cuba is no longer an "armed camp," then "we probably wouldn't invade," in the president's words. He added that, if it hoped to be free from the threat of U.S. invasion, Cuba must end its "political subversion" (Stern's phrase) in Latin America. "Political subversion" had been a constant theme for years, invoked for example when Eisenhower overthrew the parliamentary government of Guatemala and plunged that tortured country into an abyss from which it has yet to emerge. And these themes remained alive and well right through Ronald Reagan's vicious terror wars in Central America in the 1980s. Cuba's "political subversion" consisted of support for those resisting the murderous assaults of the U.S. and its client regimes, and sometimes even perhaps -- horror of horrors -- providing arms to the victims.

The usage is standard. Thus, in 1955, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had outlined "three basic forms of aggression." The first was armed attack across a border, that is, aggression as defined in international law. The second was "overt armed attack from within the area of each of the sovereign states," as when guerrilla forces undertake armed resistance

against a regime backed or imposed by Washington, though not of course when "freedom fighters" resist an official enemy. The third: "Aggression other than armed, i.e., political warfare, or subversion." The primary example at the time was South Vietnam, where the United States was defending a free people from "internal aggression," as Kennedy's U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson explained -- from "an assault from within" in the president's words.

Though these assumptions are so deeply embedded in prevailing doctrine as to be virtually invisible, they are occasionally articulated in the internal record. In the case of Cuba, the State Department Policy Planning Council explained that "the primary danger we face in Castro is... in the impact (the very existence of his regime has upon the leftist movement in many Latin American countries... The simple fact is that Castro represents a successful defiance of the US, a negation of our whole hemispheric policy of almost a century and a half," since the Monroe Doctrine announced Washington's intention, then unrealizable, to dominate the Western hemisphere.

AAA!

Wow?
mf?

Stone
Oct 62

✓

Not the Russians of that moment then, but rather the right to dominate, a leading principle of foreign policy found almost everywhere, though typically concealed in defensive terms: during the Cold War years, routinely by invoking the "Russian threat," even when Russians were nowhere in sight. An example of great contemporary import is revealed in Iran scholar Ervand Abrahamian's important upcoming book of the U.S.-U.K. coup that overthrew the parliamentary regime of Iran in 1953. With scrupulous examination of internal records, he shows convincingly that standard accounts cannot be sustained. The primary causes were not Cold War concerns, nor Iranian irrationality that undermined Washington's "benign intentions," nor even access to oil or profits, but rather the way the U.S. demand for "overall controls" -- with its broader implications for global dominance -- was threatened by independent nationalism.

That is what we discover over and over by investigating particular cases, including Cuba (not surprisingly) though the fanaticism in that particular case might merit examination. U.S. policy towards Cuba is harshly condemned throughout Latin America and indeed most of the world, but "a decent respect for the opinions of mankind" is understood to be meaningless rhetoric intoned mindlessly on July 4th. Ever since polls have been taken on the matter, a considerable majority of the U.S. population has avored normalization of relations with Cuba, but that too is insignificant.

One. Another.
Explaining
result was
Empire "..."
Liberation
Stagger!

Dismissal of public opinion is of course quite normal. What is interesting in this case is dismissal of powerful sectors of U.S. economic power, which also favor normalization, and are usually highly influential in setting policy: energy, agribusiness, pharmaceuticals, and

others. That suggests that, in addition to the cultural factors revealed in the hysteria of the Camelot intellectuals, there is a powerful state interest involved in punishing Cubans.

Saving the World from the Threat of Nuclear Destruction

The missile crisis officially ended on October 28th. The outcome was not obscure. That evening, in a special CBS News broadcast, Charles Collingwood reported that the world had come out "from under the most terrible threat of nuclear holocaust since World War II" with a "humiliating defeat for Soviet policy." Dobbs comments that the Russians tried to pretend that the outcome was "yet another triumph for Moscow's peace-loving foreign policy over warmongering imperialists," and that "[t]he supremely wise, always reasonable Soviet leadership had saved the world from the threat of nuclear destruction."

Extricating the basic facts from the fashionable ridicule, Khrushchev's agreement to capitulate had indeed "saved the world from the threat of nuclear destruction."

The crisis, however, was not over. On November 8th, the Pentagon announced that all known Soviet missile bases had been dismantled. On the same day, Stern reports, "a sabotage team carried out an attack on a Cuban factory," though Kennedy's terror campaign, Operation Mongoose, had been formally curtailed at the peak of the crisis. The November 8th terror attack lends support to Bundy's observation that the threat to peace was Cuba, not Turkey, where the Russians were not continuing a lethal assault -- though that was certainly not what Bundy had in mind or could have understood.

More details are added by the highly respected scholar Raymond Garthoff, who also had rich experience within the government, in his careful 1987 account of the missile crisis. On November 8th, he writes, "a Cuban covert action sabotage team dispatched from the United States successfully blew up a Cuban industrial facility," killing 400 workers according to a Cuban government letter to the U.N. Secretary General.

Garthoff comments: "The Soviets could only see [the attack] as an effort to backpedal on what was, for them, the key question remaining: American assurances not to attack Cuba," particularly since the terrorist attack was launched from the U.S. These and other "third party actions" reveal again, he concludes, "that the risk and danger to both sides could have been extreme, and catastrophe not excluded." Garthoff also reviews the murderous and destructive operations of Kennedy's terrorist campaign, which we would certainly regard as more than ample justification for war, if the U.S. or its allies or clients were victims, not perpetrators.

From the same source we learn further that, on August 23, 1962, the

JFK!
(but also
SU: 44
was a
nuclear crisis
(like Berlin?)
(for some
reason?
disputed
K: (em
at war?
US conventional
sup.)
tough
intervention
with war?
real
MIRROR?
(like:
SU 1983/
US 1958
25 yrs
total
(2014-15
beta

debate!
Oxford

!

president had issued National Security Memorandum No. 181, "a directive to engineer an internal revolt that would be followed by U.S. military intervention," involving "significant U.S. military plans, maneuvers, and movement of forces and equipment" that were surely known to Cuba and Russia. Also in August, terrorist attacks were intensified, including speedboat strafing attacks on a Cuban seaside hotel "where Soviet military technicians were known to congregate, killing a score of Russians and Cubans"; attacks on British and Cuban cargo ships; the contamination of sugar shipments; and other atrocities and sabotage, mostly carried out by Cuban exile organizations permitted to operate freely in Florida. Shortly after came "the most dangerous moment in human history," not exactly out of the blue.

63

Kennedy officially renewed the terrorist operations after the crisis ebbed. Ten days before his assassination he approved a CIA plan for "destruction operations" by U.S. proxy forces "against a large oil refinery and storage facilities, a large electric plant, sugar refineries, railroad bridges, harbor facilities, and underwater demolition of docks and ships." A plot to assassinate Castro was apparently initiated on the day of the Kennedy assassination. The terrorist campaign was called off in 1965, but reports Garthoff, "one of Nixon's first acts in office in 1969 was to direct the CIA to intensify covert operations against Cuba."

✓

We can, at last, hear the voices of the victims in Canadian historian Keith Bolender's Voices From the Other Side, the first oral history of the terror campaign -- one of many books unlikely to receive more than casual notice, if that, in the West because the contents are too revealing.

✓

!

In the current issue of *Political Science Quarterly*, the professional journal of the association of American political scientists, Montague Kern observes that the Cuban missile crisis is one of those "full-bore crises... in which an ideological enemy (the Soviet Union) is universally perceived to have gone on the attack, leading to a rally-'round-the-flag effect that greatly expands support for a president, increasing his policy options."

Kern is right that it is "universally perceived" that way, apart from those who have escaped sufficiently from the ideological shackles to pay some attention to the facts. Kern is, in fact, one of them. Another is Sheldon Stern, who recognizes what has long been known to such deviants. As he writes, we now know that "Khrushchev's original explanation for shipping missiles to Cuba had been fundamentally true: the Soviet leader had never intended these weapons as a threat to the security of the United States, but rather considered their deployment a defensive move to protect his Cuban allies from American attacks and as a desperate effort to give the U.S.S.R. the appearance of equality in the nuclear balance of power." Dobbs, too, recognizes that "Castro and his Soviet patrons had real reasons to fear American attempts at regime

✓

Berlin?

change, including, as a last resort, a U.S. invasion of Cuba...

[Khrushchev] was also sincere in his desire to defend the Cuban revolution from the mighty neighbor to the north."

"Terrors of the Earth"

The American attacks are often dismissed in U.S. commentary as silly pranks, CIA shenanigans that got out of hand. That is far from the truth. The best and the brightest had reacted to the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion with near hysteria, including the president, who solemnly informed the country: "The complacent, the self-indulgent, the soft societies are about to be swept away with the debris of history. Only the strong... can possibly survive." And they could only survive, he evidently believed, by massive terror -- though that addendum was kept secret, and is still not known to loyalists who perceive the ideological enemy as having "gone on the attack" (the near universal perception, as Kern observes). After the Bay of Pigs defeat, historian Piero Gleijeses writes, JFK launched a crushing embargo to punish the Cubans for defeating a U.S.-run invasion, and "asked his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, to lead the top-level interagency group that oversaw Operation Mongoose, a program of paramilitary operations, economic warfare, and sabotage he launched in late 1961 to visit the 'terrors of the earth' on Fidel Castro and, more prosaically, to topple him."

The phrase "terrors of the earth" is Arthur Schlesinger's, in his quasi-official biography of Robert Kennedy, who was assigned responsibility for conducting the terrorist war, and informed the CIA that the Cuban problem carries "[t]he top priority in the United States Government -- all else is secondary -- no time, no effort, or manpower is to be spared" in the effort to overthrow the Castro regime. The Mongoose operations were run by Edward Lansdale, who had ample experience in "counterinsurgency" -- a standard term for terrorism that we direct. He provided a timetable leading to "open revolt and overthrow of the Communist regime" in October 1962. The "final definition" of the program recognized that "final success will require decisive U.S. military intervention," after terrorism and subversion had laid the basis. The implication is that U.S. military intervention would take place in October 1962 -- when the missile crisis erupted. The events just reviewed help explain why Cuba and Russia had good reason to take such threats seriously.

Years later, Robert McNamara recognized that Cuba was justified in fearing an attack. "If I were in Cuban or Soviet shoes, I would have thought so, too," he observed at a major conference on the missile crisis on the 40th anniversary. 2002?

As for Russia's "desperate effort to give the U.S.S.R. the appearance of equality," to which Stern refers, recall that Kennedy's very narrow

victory in the 1960 election relied heavily on a fabricated "missile gap" concocted to terrify the country and to condemn the Eisenhower administration as soft on national security. There was indeed a "missile gap," but strongly in favor of the U.S.

The first "public, unequivocal administration statement" on the true facts, according to strategic analyst Desmond Ball in his authoritative study of the Kennedy missile program, was in October 1961, when Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric informed the Business Council that "the U.S. would have a larger nuclear delivery system left after a surprise attack than the nuclear force which the Soviet Union could employ in its first strike." The Russians of course were well aware of their relative weakness and vulnerability. They were also aware of Kennedy's reaction when Khrushchev offered to sharply reduce offensive military capacity and proceeded to do so unilaterally. The president failed to respond, undertaking instead a huge armaments program.

Owning the World, Then and Now

The two most crucial questions about the missile crisis are: How did it begin, and how did it end? It began with Kennedy's terrorist attack against Cuba, with a threat of invasion in October 1962. It ended with the president's rejection of Russian offers that would seem fair to a rational person, but were unthinkable because they would have undermined the fundamental principle that the U.S. has the unilateral right to deploy nuclear missiles anywhere, aimed at China or Russia or anyone else, and right on their borders; and the accompanying principle that Cuba had no right to have missiles for defense against what appeared to be an imminent U.S. invasion. To establish these principles firmly it was entirely proper to face a high risk of war of unimaginable destruction, and to reject simple and admittedly fair ways to end the threat.

Garthoff observes that "in the United States, there was almost universal approbation for President Kennedy's handling of the crisis." Dobbs writes, "The relentlessly upbeat tone was established by the court historian, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., who wrote that Kennedy had 'dazzled the world' through a 'combination of toughness and restraint, of will, nerve and wisdom, so brilliantly controlled, so matchlessly calibrated.'" Rather more soberly, Stern partially agrees, noting that Kennedy repeatedly rejected the militant advice of his advisers and associates who called for military force and the dismissal of peaceful options. The events of October 1962 are widely hailed as Kennedy's finest hour. Graham Allison joins many others in presenting them as "a guide for how to defuse conflicts, manage great-power relationships, and make sound decisions about foreign policy in general."

K in C-II doesn't tell us, our threats are dangerous.

like Garthoff in 1983 (able to see, PSYOPS)

(19 years after "D. S." 21 after are dangerous, more than we realize)

well - also,
we can't
bring our
secretly of
gen's up,
we think
& offer, what
we had
described as
part of
USO's
secret
(after
Spartan &
ICBM)
Khrushchev
didn't show
on
commitment to
EU for
Europe
[but as EU/ES
unlike, prior to
US (CBMs)]

In a very narrow sense, that judgment seems reasonable. The ExComm tapes reveal that the president stood apart from others, sometimes almost all others, in rejecting premature violence. There is, however, a further question: How should JFK's relative moderation in the management of the crisis be evaluated against the background of the broader considerations just reviewed? But that question does not arise in a disciplined intellectual and moral culture, which accepts without question the basic principle that the U.S. effectively owns the world by right, and is by definition a force for good despite occasional errors and misunderstandings, one in which it is plainly entirely proper for the U.S. to deploy massive offensive force all over the world while it is an outrage for others (allies and clients apart) to make even the slightest gesture in that direction or even to think of deterring the threatened use of violence by the benign global hegemon.

That doctrine is the primary official charge against Iran today: it might pose a deterrent to U.S. and Israeli force. It was a consideration during the missile crisis as well. In internal discussion, the Kennedy brothers expressed their fears that Cuban missiles might deter a U.S. invasion of Venezuela, then under consideration. So "the Bay of Pigs was really right," JFK concluded.

These principles still contribute to the constant risk of nuclear war. There has been no shortage of severe dangers since the missile crisis. Ten years later, during the 1973 Israel-Arab war, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger called a high-level nuclear alert (DEFCON 3) to warn the Russians to keep their hands off while he was secretly authorizing Israel to violate the cease-fire imposed by the U.S. and Russia. When Reagan came into office a few years later, the U.S. launched operations probing Russian defenses and simulating air and naval attacks, while placing Pershing missiles in Germany with a five-minute flight time to Russian targets, providing what the CIA called a "super-sudden first strike" capability. Naturally this caused great alarm in Russia, which unlike the U.S. has repeatedly been invaded and virtually destroyed. That led to a major war scare in 1983. There have been hundreds of cases when human intervention aborted a first strike minutes before launch, after automated systems gave false alarms. We don't have Russian records, but there's no doubt that their systems are far more accident-prone.

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan have come close to nuclear war several times, and the sources of the conflict remain. Both have refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty, along with Israel, and have received U.S. support for development of their nuclear weapons programs -- until today in the case of India, now a U.S. ally. War threats in the Middle East, which might become reality very soon, once again escalate the dangers.

+ IC

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+ after?
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(see - NSA 13)

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In 1962, war was avoided by Khrushchev's willingness to accept
 Kennedy's hegemonic demands. But we can hardly count on such
 sanity forever. It's a near miracle that nuclear war has so far been
 avoided. There is more reason than ever to attend to the warning of
 Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, almost 60 years ago, that we must
 face a choice that is "stark and dreadful and inescapable: Shall we put
 an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?"

*Noam Chomsky is Institute Professor Emeritus in the MIT Department
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empire; regime change;
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FU / FS

Assumption

+ FS (w/)

weapons ...

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1995!

Present!

P-II!

in Barack
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